

# The Child of Babylon and the Problem of Paternity in Medieval French *Alexander* Romances.

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The medieval French *Alexander* romances are intimately concerned with paternity, both in narrative terms, in the form of a constant debate over Alexander's legitimacy, and in terms of authorship.<sup>1</sup> Alexander the Great has too many fathers in those versions where his mother Olympias believes him to have been fathered by the god Ammon (the exiled pharaoh Nectanebus in disguise), or too few, in those texts where the debate over Alexander's birth is swept aside in favour of his legal father Philip of Macedon. The debate over paternity has long been identified as a transparent debate over textual authority, because one series of sources (the various translations of the Pseudo-Callimachus) describes the adulterous liaison between Olympias and Nectanebus, and another maintains his legitimacy. Alexander's multifaceted character has been identified by Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas as a key factor in the immense success of the vernacular tradition in France.<sup>2</sup>

The multi-volume edition of the medieval vernacular *Alexander* romances, published in the Elliott Monographs series of Princeton University Press over several decades, offers a fascinating, if incomplete, picture of this tradition in continental France.<sup>3</sup> It is complemented by the early thirteenth-century *Prose Alexander*, edited in 1920 by Hilka, as well as by the recent editions of the comparatively neglected late-medieval prose romances by Jehan Wauquelin (1444-48), Vasque de Lucène (1468) and the anonymous *remanieur* whose work will be discussed below.<sup>4</sup>

These successive editions enable the reader to trace the *Alexander* tradition in terms of its dense network of manuscripts,

composite and isolated traditions, *remaniements*, versions put into and out of verse, translations and continuations. The related issues of textual and biographical paternity were evidently a single issue for some vernacular poets, as we can see in the prologue of Alexandre de Paris's *Roman d'Alexandre* (c. 1180) where he refuses to entertain the possibility of Alexander the Great's multiple fathers and asserts that he was the son of Philip of Macedon (branch I, ll. 145-48). This Alexander the Great is also the true 'son' of this compiler called Alexander, variously of Bernay or of Paris. Alexander the vernacular *remanieur* inscribes himself in his own lineage by pointing out the differences between his text and that of one Alexandre d'Alhier (ll. 56-57).<sup>5</sup>

The *Vengeance Alexandre* by Jean le Nevelon (c. 1181) gives Alexander the Great a son called Alior, whose mission it is to avenge his father's death; according to Renée Nicolet Liscinsky, the name Alior should be viewed as an allusion to Alexandre d'Alhier.<sup>6</sup> Thus this poem may seek to close the history by echoing the name not of one of the Macedonian's relatives, but one of the French authors who transmitted a rival Alexander tradition in rhyme. It seems apposite therefore to devote a study of lineage and family relationships to the figure of Alior/Alyor, and to another child (a fatherless one) that foretells Alexander's death.

This article compares the 'core' texts of the French Alexander tradition of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with a fifteenth-century version, the anonymous Burgundian *Faits et conquestes* that only subsists in manuscript 836 of the Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon, edited by Renée Nicolet Liscinsky.<sup>7</sup> This is the second of two *mises en prose* of the verse Alexander tradition in the fifteenth century (in 1468, Vasque de Lucène produced a prose history that was based on Quintus Curtius and Plutarch, not the Old French poems).<sup>8</sup> It is a prose rendering, copied by a single hand, with a distinct bias in favour of the courtly aspects of the story. I designate this compiler as 'he', but it is of course plausible that such work might have been produced by a woman. The manuscript's original context cannot be established due to the loss of its prologue, but it was illuminated and might have been destined for a Burgundian court. The narrative is divided into seven parts of between ten and thirty-nine chapters each (a tabulation appears on the first folio), and each part corresponds to

the narrative poem that has been put into prose; the *Voeux du Paon* of Jacques de Longuyon (c. 1312) takes up three parts (III-V), and the sections that interests us here are adapted from the *Mort Alixandre* (part VI) and the *Vengeance* by Jean le Nevelon.<sup>9</sup> The *remanieur* may have worked from a cyclical manuscript of a type similar to Oxford MS Bodley 264 (completed in Tournai, c. 1344).<sup>10</sup>

Gosman's close analysis of the *remanieur*'s work leads him to conclude that by dint of cutting, condensing and rephrasing his material, he creates a subtle but definite alteration in the meaning and ideology of the narrative. For Gosman, this is above all at the service of an idealisation of the anachronistic ethos of chivalry that is typical of its time and milieu, and that is reflected in the impressive number of manuscripts that were being produced of the *Voeux du Paon*.<sup>11</sup> This article will argue that the *remaniement* also stresses the importance of a portent in order to develop the role of Alyor.

### Disputed paternity

The fourth branch of the Old French *Roman d'Alexandre*, sometimes entitled *La Mort Alexandre*, opens with a portent. A woman in the city of Babylon gives birth to a monstrous child:

A l'issue de may, tout droit en cel termine  
 Que li biaux tans revient et yvers se decline,  
 Estoit en Babilone nes d'une Sarrasine  
 Uns mostres merveleus par volenté devine.  
 Alixandres l'ot dire si manda la meschine.  
 Deseure iert chose morte desi q'en la poitrine,  
 Et desous estoit vive, la ou il faut l'eschine.  
 Tout environ les aines, la ou il ventres fine,  
 De ces plus fieres bestes qui vivent de rapine  
 I avoit pluisors testes et font chiere lovine;  
 Molt sont de male part et de malvaise orine,  
 Ne se pueent souffrir, l'une l'autre esgratine.  
 Molt par est grans mervele que Dieus el mont destine,  
 Que la mort Alixandre veut demostre par sinne.  
 (Branch IV, ll. 1-14)<sup>12</sup>

[In May, in the middle of the season when the good weather returns and winter ends, in Babylon a Saracen woman gave birth by divine will to a marvellous monster. Alexander heard about it and had the girl brought before him. In the upper part, it was a dead thing down to its chest, and below, at the base of its spine, it was alive. Around its anus, where the abdomen ends, there were the fiercest of predatory beasts. They had several heads, and snarled like wolves. They are very vicious and nasty, they are hostile towards each other, one claws at the other. It is received as a wondrous sign of God's will, showing the death of Alexander through a sign.]

Babylonian astrologers are called and one interprets the monstrous child as an omen of Alexander's death, followed by wars between his twelve peers (line 29) and the collapse of his empire.

Alexander stays silent but he is terrified, and the colour of his face changes from red to black (ll. 36-42). He has observed a similar silence and distress after hearing the predictions of the speaking trees of the Sun and the Moon, which foretell his betrayal by his men and his death in Babylon (branch III, ll. 3781-3877). The monstrous birth comes after the journey to the Terrestrial Paradise, the encounter with the seasonal flower girls ( ll. 3299-3550), and the fountain of youth (ll. 3624-3712). These encounters present Alexander's army with promises of eternal youth and fertility, but the trees of the Sun and the Moon warn that Alexander is about to achieve his goal by conquering both India and Babylon. They warn him that his success will be as short-lived as the life-cycle of the flower-girls. It is in fact the talking trees that warn Alexander of his fate, not the monstrous birth that merely seems to herald its enactment.

The omen of the child was particularly significant for the fifteenth-century *remanieur* who produced the Besançon manuscript:

Environ l'issue du mois de may que le plaisance de l'esté commence avoir vigueur quant l'iver est terminé, vint a la congnoissance du roy Alexandre comment grant renommee couroit que en la cite de Babillonne, estoit nez ung monstre merueilleux. Laquele chose oyant le roy, il manda venir devers luy la mere du nouvel né, de laquele il encquist toute

la nature de sa imfecte generation. Et elle luy en declara la facion au plus prez, disant que depuis la poitrine en aval, il estoit comme chose morte, sur l'esquine ressamblant a beste de rapine comme lyon en ses parties, et aiant pluseurs testes loupines, lesqueles estoient de si felonne nature que souffrir ne pouioent l'une l'autre remuer, disant oultre au roy que, par la nativité de ceste figure, les anguriens destinoient sa mort. (Nicolet Liscinsky, p. 345)

[Around the end of May, when the pleasantness of the summer starts to strengthen when winter has finished, it came to King Alexander's knowledge that a great rumour was circulating that in the city of Babylon a marvellous monster had been born. When the king heard this thing, he had the newborn's mother summoned to come to him and asked her about the nature of her corrupted issue. She described its appearance as closely as she could, saying that from its chest down it was like a dead thing, on its back it looked like a predatory beast, and like a lion in its limbs, having several lupine heads that were of such criminal nature that they could not bear each other's movement, and she also said to the king that the birth of this figure made the soothsayers predict his death.]

In this version, Alexander does not see the monstrous birth with his own eyes. Instead, the mother describes the child to him. This verbal portrait, and the rumours that alert him to the portent, are more powerful than the child itself. The reduction of the child to oral report is true to the *remanieur's* systematic omission throughout his text of marvels and supernatural episodes. Oddly, the portent is interpreted by one wise man as if the monstrous child were actually present:

Ce que tu vois, oudit monstre qui est mort et flasty, signifie ta mort prochaine, et la multitude des testes en ycelluy, que tu vois ainsi resquingnier l'une contre l'autre et maintenir tant envieusement, te demoustré la grant envie des .XII. pers de ton royaulme, a quy tu as procuré tant de biens; lesquelz prestement, ta vie finee, quy a mon jugement sera tres

briefve, commenceront la guerre entr'eulz par convoitise de domination tant impeteuse que tous tes pays et subietz en serront comme exterminiez. (p. 346)

[That which you see, that dead and fallen monster, signifies your coming death, and the many heads upon it, which you can see scowling at one another, and acting so enviously of each other, show you the mutual envy among the twelve peers of your kingdom, [those men] to whom you have given so much. Once your life (which I think will be short) is over, they will quickly start a war among themselves, impelled by such a strong lust for power that it will be as if all your countries and subjects were destroyed.]

The wise man treats the oral description of the child as the equivalent of his visible presence, 'Ce que tu vois' ('That which you see'). The portent also has the new significance that the peers (the wolves' heads) are driven to war not by their bestial (irrational) violence but by mutual suspicion and envy, both of which are recognisable human traits. A reported portent bears a political message to the king.

As in the treatment of Quintus Curtius by his contemporary Vasque de Lucène, the Besançon *remanieur* omits traditional marvels in favour of chivalric biography, but he keeps the Babylonian child, probably because his *remaniement* exploits the murder of Alexander as a narrative thread. According to Nicolet Liscinsky, by opening each of the five parts of his text with a reference to Alexander's death in Babylon, the Besançon author places the entire biography under the aegis of the king's doomed destiny.<sup>13</sup> The Besançon text omits Alexander's birth and childhood, but its treatment of the monstrous child in terms of its treatment of the issue of visual appearance, the *monstrum* or the *semblance*, may reflect the otherwise buried debate concerning Alexander's paternity.

In an article on the thirteenth-century Prose *Roman d'Alexandre*, Michelle Warren argues that the Babylonian child illustrates Alexander's troubled paternity. In the Prose *Alexandre*, the baby's mother claims that it has been fathered by Alexander, a detail that stresses the connection for the reader (Hilka, pp. 244-45). Warren reads the omen in terms of the text's expansionist agenda: 'This child

of imperial desire incarnates colonial hybridity, literally fusing the noble conqueror with the monstrous native.<sup>14</sup> She treats the astronomer's interpretation as an additional narrative element, predicting (perhaps desiring) the disintegration of Alexander's empire.

Elsewhere in the same article, Warren argues that such images may be viewed as a summary of this tradition's complex exploration of territorial expansion and human frailty: 'Expansionism [...] forcefully reconfigures the relationships between what belongs together (through resemblance) and what does not (through difference).'<sup>15</sup> Warren notes that the Prose *Alexandre* steers a distinctive course in this respect: 'As he [Alexander] moves across foreign landscapes, he repeatedly encounters civilizations and hybrid beings who destabilize the difference between the familiar and the foreign'.<sup>16</sup> She suggests that the Prose *Roman d'Alexandre* emphasises the subjective dimension of Alexander's encounters with the unknown: 'In the Prose *Alexandre*, he often reacts violently when confronted with hints of resemblance; at other times, he lets differences remain curious anomalies. In both cases, his encounters with indigenous peoples stabilize difference, offering the reader intractable images of successful imperial hegemony.'<sup>17</sup> Warren translates the Old French term *semblance* throughout her article as the modern English 'resemblance' (similarity, likeness) but strictly speaking it refers also to superficial, even deceptive appearance.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the Babylonians are not depicted as monsters. In the case of the Prose *Alexandre*, the only person who has desired this fusion between invader and 'native' is the Babylonian mother, and her paternity claim is false.

There is another reason to have misgivings about reading Alexander the Great as a champion of expansionist (colonial) sameness over 'native' difference, and that lies in his own hybridity. The description of the Babylonian child connects with the oldest surviving French Alexander text. The surviving fragment of Albéric de Pisançon's version presents an Alexander who blends animal, fish, dragon and bird (ll. 1-2):<sup>19</sup>

Saur ab lo peyl cum de peyson,  
Tot cresp cum coma de leon;  
L'un uyl ab glauc cum de dracon  
Et l'autre neyr cum de falcon.

De la figura en aviron  
 Beyn resemplet fil de baron.  
 (MFRA, vol. III, p. 38, ll. 60-65)

[He had hair that was as golden as that of a fish, as curly as a lion's mane; one eye was blue-green like that of a dragon, the other black like a falcon's. From the face down, he looked like the son of a nobleman.]

Albéric adds that this has been interpreted maliciously by some *estrobatour* ('trouble-makers', according to Ulrich Mölk) as a sign of Alexander's illegitimate birth, the son of the magician and Pharaoh Nectanebus:

Dicunt alquant estrobatour  
 Que.l reys fud filz d'encantatour.  
 Mentent, felon losengetour  
 (MFRA, III, p. 38, ll. 27-9)

[Some trouble-makers say the king was the son of an enchanter; they lie, wicked deceivers!]<sup>20</sup>

The Old French *Alexandre décasyllabique* removed the reference to fish and to dragons' eyes and made him a conventional, if startling, blend of man, royal lion and courtly falcon (line 71).<sup>21</sup> If Alexander the Great's physical appearance is the pattern of what resemblance is (rather than difference), it is hard to accept that this is the same man who is also a blend of fish, beast and bird.

These considerations are crucial when interpreting the Babylonian child as it is a visual phenomenon (though it is not actually seen by the Macedonian king), and a *monstre*. *Monstrum* is a creature or object that *demonstrates*: it shows or reveals a portent. In Old French, the masculine noun *monstre* and the verb *monstrer* (to show or display) could work together: a 'monster' could 'demonstrate' an idea. A monster is above all a visual phenomenon, or at least a thing of external appearances.<sup>22</sup> Nor are animals devoid of significant *semblance*. One of Alexander's first great deeds as a youth is his taming of the multicoloured horse-bull hybrid Bucephalus, and this



also portends his exceptional destiny (Alexandre de Paris, branch I, ll. 385-483).

In the Alexandre de Paris text, Alexander rides another warhorse, Vairon, to Babylon. The *destrier* is not a hybrid like Bucephalus, but it has a red head, white neck and flanks, black legs and a dappled crupper. Its mixture of colours seems to be invested implicitly with significance. First, it illustrates Alexander's status as the best and most courageous pagan king, and second, it points to his knowledge of medicine, astronomy and necromancy:<sup>28</sup>

Alexandre chevalche par fiere contenance,  
 Li douze per o lui, ou il a grant fiance,  
 Et sist sor un destrier de diverse semblance;  
 La teste ot plus vermelle que n'est tains de garance,  
 Le col et les costés ot blans par demonstrance,  
 La crope ot pumelee par autre difERENCE,  
 Les quatre pies ot noirs, ce fu senefiance.  
 Onques plus hardis rois que lui ne porta lance,  
 Par sa proëce a il sor tout le mont puissance;  
 Onques teus rois ne fu, s'en Dieu eüst creance.  
 Trop sot d'astronomie et plus de ningremance,  
 Assés sot de fisique, apris l'ot en s'enfance.  
 (MFRA, branch III, ll. 5149-60)

[Alexander rides with a proud countenance, his twelve peers with him, in whom he places great trust. He sits astride a warhorse of variegated appearance. Its head is redder than madder dye, its neck and flanks are visibly white, the hind parts are dappled - another difference - and its four hooves are black: that was a sign. Never did a braver king carry a lance. Through his prowess he wields power across the world. No king was ever like him, if only he believed in God! He knew a lot about astronomy and more about necromancy; he knew enough of medicine, for he had learned it during his childhood.]

Medieval genetic theory held that parental imagination could imprint the unborn child with emblematic physical features. Hybrid

appearance may then allude to Alexander's problematic conception, notably in the texts where Olympias is seduced by the necromancer-pharaoh Nectanebus in disguise as the ram-headed god Ammon.<sup>24</sup> The fact that the chivalric Alexander in the quotation above is also a necromancer underlines his secret paternity. However, the text also makes that heredity a matter of nurture: it notes that he has retained the medical knowledge that he acquired from Nectanebus. He is the product both of Philip and Nectanebus, the conquering king and the dethroned magician. It remains that the hybrid child of Babylon is a phenomenon that these versions of Alexander would find germane to his own nature and physical appearance.

#### Alyor and paternal resemblance

The Besançon *remaniement* side-steps the question of Alexander's paternity throughout the text, up to his last days, when it resurfaces only through the monstrous child. The *remanieur* then moves his attention on to the *Venjeance Alexandre*. This gives quite a different flavour to the repeated warnings that Alexander will meet his death at the hands of his own men in Babylon, because rather than announcing his tragic demise, it sets the stage for his son Alyor's decision to avenge his father's murder. Alyor is raised in ignorance of who his father is by his mother Candace, but at the age of fifteen, he realises the truth when he stumbles across the painted portrait of Alexander that his mother had commissioned before she met him, based on descriptions of him.<sup>25</sup> In other words, he encounters his own father through a visual image built from words, like the monstrous child. Initially, he believes that the image is of his own face:

Une fois entre autres estoit Alyor en une chambre de leur pallaix avecq sa mere, ou il percheut une paincture d'ymage, qui a son advis bien le ressembloit, selon qu'il pouuoit avoir congnoissance de sa figure. Si demanda a sa mere s'elle scavoit pour qui avoit en tempz si nouvel esté faite ceste pourtraiture; laquelle delaia une espace de luy en voulloir la verité descouvrir, mais en fin tant la pressa l'enfant Alyor qu'elle luy dist pour que la personne d'Alexandre, qui moult l'amoit, avoit esté l'ymage fait. (p. 373, ll. 3-10)

[Another time, Alyor was with his mother, in a chamber of their palace, where he noticed a painted image that he thought looked like him, inasmuch as he knew anything about his own appearance. He asked his mother if she knew for whom this portrait had been made so long ago. She hesitated a little about telling him the truth, but the child Alyor pressed her so much that she told him that the painting had been made of Alexander, who had loved her greatly.]

The Besançon *remaniement* anticipates Alexander's death when he fathers Alyor. As he takes his leave of Candace, we are told, 'se parti d'elle l'emperour pour son desirier adcomplir qu'il avoit de parvenir en Babillonne ou malheur le mena finer.' (The Emperor left her to fulfil his desire to get to Babylon, where misfortune led him to die) (*Fais et Conquestes*, part II, ll. 1029-30). Its treatment of its sources therefore works to establish a link between the conception of Alyor and his later destiny as his father's avenger. Jean le Névelon's prologue to the *Venjançe*, the source for this scene, asserts that Alyor is his father's exact replica in his face, hair and upper body:

Bien resamble Alixandre de cors et de poitrine  
Et de vis et de bouche et de chiere et de crine:  
Alior ot a nom en cele langagine. (ll. 85-7)

[He looks like Alexander in body and in his chest, his face, his mouth, his complexion and his hair: he is called Alior in this language.]

He adds: 'Bien ressemble Alixandre de cors et d'estature/ Et de vis et de bras et de regardeüre.' ('He closely resembles Alexander in body and height, in face, arms and gaze'); (ll. 95-6).<sup>26</sup> From head to chest, Alyor is the replica of his father.

The Babylonian child's appearance is mirrored in that of Alyor. One child embodies disunity, neither living nor dead. The other affirms the continuation of Alexander's paternal lineage (a problematic concept in itself), but expresses it as a desire for *ad hominem*

retribution, not the rebuilding of the empire. The Babylonian child foretells a body politic that is at odds with itself, the failure by the twelve peers to maintain their lord's empire. Alyor, still a child at the age of fifteen, seeks to reunite the twelve peers not to rebuild the empire, but to avenge the supreme betrayal of court unity that was Antipater's murder of Alexander.

Alyor sends out letters with the portrait of Alexander of their seal in order to provoke an emotional reaction in the peers:

Mais le roy, qui estoit courtois, en prenant la lettre (...) regarda moult fort le seel. Si recongneut bien la figure d'Alexandre qui y estoit empreinte. (...) Le seel ne rompy pas le roy a ouvrir la lettre, pour l'honneur de celui qui tant de biens luy avoit fais en sa vie. (part VII, p. 378).

[But the king, who was courtly, as he took the letter (...) looked hard at the seal. He recognised easily the portrait of Alexander that was impressed upon it (...). The king did not break the seal as he opened the letter, out of concern for the honour of the man who had shown him so much goodness in his life.]

Ariste does not break the seal, as he does not wish to destroy the image, presumably of either the face or the body of his dead lord. On the other hand, Tholomee has a similar emotional reaction to the image on the seal, but breaks it nonetheless: 'Auquel mot le roy froissa la cyre et lisi la teneur' ('at those words, the king broke the seal and read the contents'); (VII, p. 377). Ariste's loyalty to the image of Alexander is also an expression of kinship, as he later describes himself to the traitor Antipater not as Alyor's man but as his brother (VII, pp. 400-1).

The glue that Alyor uses to bring the twelve (in fact, eight) peers together is the visual image of Alexander the Great, and it circulates to affirm both that he was his father and their overlord. Nor is his resemblance purely visual, as once he has obtained his father's sword, he kills his first man by slicing him from the top of his head to the middle of his chest with a single blow (VII, p. 385). Alyor resembles his father in the head and chest, and Alexander's portrait on the seal

(being an image that is imagined by a writer of the later fifteenth century) would most probably depict only his head and chest.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps that is why Alyor needs to resemble him in both the chest and head, as he needs to be recognized from two portraits, the one that is displayed in his mother's palace, and the other that is circulating in the erstwhile empire as a seal for letters. Similarly, the child in Babylon is only of human form from its head to its chest.

By comparison, the *remanieur*'s contemporary Jean Mansel, who abbreviates the text by Wauquelin, is content to say that Candace tells Alyor that Alexander is his father in order to urge him to take revenge, 'et moustrer qu'il estoit de son sang yssus' ('and show that he was from his bloodline').<sup>28</sup> Candace, not Alyor, pacifies and reunites the generals. She brings them into Alyor's presence and asks them to protect him; his resemblance to his father delights them, but it is her rhetoric that persuades them to join her (not his) campaign of revenge. Alyor's resemblance to Alexander is a tool that Candace exploits, but it is incidental to the narrative.

## Conclusion

The Besançon *Fais et Conquestes* is the chronicle of a vengeance rather than a death foretold, but one that is foretold through two *semblances* that are significant in equal measure: the body of the Babylonian child, and the face of Alyor. Both are divided. The child is human and dead down to his navel, animal and alive below it. Alyor displays in his face, arms and chest his resemblance to the picture of a man who is dead. The Besançon *remaniement*, ironically, seems to underline the resemblance between the omen that predicts Alexander's downfall and the son who is supposed to mitigate it by perpetuating his bloodline.

To return to Warren's argument concerning the connection between expansion and the exploitation of dissimilarity, it would seem here that the resemblance between father and son may appear to affirm continuity both of the lineage and of the Alexander tradition. However, the Besançon *remanieur* also reminds the reader that when Alyor regroups the peers, their loyalty is only to the past, and the authority of this past rests on seals and images. Jean le Névelon's prologue promised his audience a new poem, adding that the other

poems (the *Roman d'Alexandre*, in fact) were old. The Besançon *remanieur* strives to 'update' this old material, essentially by condensing the story, recasting the conquests of Alexander the Great as an inexorable progression towards Babylon, and his encounter with his own fate.

The monstrous child heralds the destruction of both the king and his hybrid empire. It also sets the scene for the emergence of a second child, Alyor, whose tenuous reliance on his physical appearance means that he can only be the pale reflection of his father. Alyor can only be the avenger of his father's memory, rather than a rebuilder of his achievements. This late version of the story of Alexander the Great is itself a simplified imitation of a complex and hybrid precursor; it is a minor 'child' of a rich tradition, but not a negligible one.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a revised version of my contribution to the session 'Monstrous Progeny: Unnatural Offspring and Filial Impiety in Old French Literature', at the Leeds International Medieval Congress, 6-10 July 2008. My thanks to Jim Simpson, Sara James, and to the two anonymous readers for *Reading Medieval Studies* for their comments and suggestions. The major recent studies on the Medieval French Alexander Romances include Martin Gosman, *La Légende d'Alexandre le Grand au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Une réécriture permanente* (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1997), and the many studies published by Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas, especially her monograph, *Les Romans d'Alexandre: Aux frontières de l'épique et du romanesque* (Paris, Champion, 1998). On the issue of paternity, see the discussion by Gaullier-Bougassas in her book, pp. 347-93 (where she includes the tutor Aristotle as another 'father'), and her article, 'Jean Wauquelin et Vasque de Lucène: Le « roman familial » d'Alexandre et l'écriture de l'histoire au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales*, 5 (1998): 125-38.

<sup>2</sup> '[D]un texte à l'autre, nous pouvons suivre les différentes étapes de la création d'une figure mythique médiévale spécifique, une figure plurielle compte tenu de la diversité des œuvres et des points de vue,' Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas, 'La fortune du *Roman d'Alexandre* d'Alexandre de Paris: continuations et création d'un cycle (XII<sup>e</sup> - XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)', *Anabases*, 2 (2005): 147-159, quotation at p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Restricting the survey for reasons of practicality means that I exclude as Anglo-Norman/insular Thomas of Kent's *Le Roman d'Alexandre, ou le Roman de toute chevalerie*, trans. Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas and Laurence Harf-Lancner of the edition by Brian Foster and Ian Short (Paris, Champion, 2003). The corpus of 'continental' French poems is edited as *The Medieval French Roman d'Alexandre*, edited by E.C. Armstrong, M.S. La Du et al, 7 vols, Elliott Monographs in the Romance Languages and Literatures; 36-42 (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1935-1976); (hereafter MFRA). The *Roman d'Alexandre* by Alexandre de Paris is divided up into 'branches' by the scholarship, but it was edited in volumes (sometimes discontinuously) by the Elliott Monographs series. For a useful study of this textual tradition, which he describes as 'a mess', see Keith Busby, 'Codices manuscriptos nudos tenemus': Alexander and the new

Codicology', in *The Medieval French Alexander*, edited by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (New York, SUNY Press, 2002), pp. 259-273.

<sup>4</sup> *Der Altfranzösische Prosa-Alexanderroman nach der Berliner Bilderhandschrift nebst dem Lateinischen Original der Historia de Preliis (Rezension J2)*, edited by Alfons Hilka (Halle, S.M. Niemeyer, 1920).

<sup>5</sup> For a very concise discussion, see Gaullier-Bougassas, 'La fortune du *Roman d'Alexandre*'.

<sup>6</sup> *Les Fais et les Conquistes du Noble Roy Alexandre: édition du manuscrit 836 de la Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon*, edited by Renée Nicolet Liscinsky (Ann Arbor, Michigan, University Microfilms International, 1980), p. 450. The Jean le Névelon continuation, as well as the eight different versions of the 'revenge' episode, have been edited and studied as follows: *Jehan le Nevelon: La Venjance Alixandre*, edited by Edward Billings Ham, Elliott Monographs, 27 (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1931); also by Ham, *Five Versions of the Venjance Alixandre*, Elliott Monographs, 34 (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1935), and also by Ham, 'An eighth *Venjance Alixandre*', *Modern Language Notes*, 56 (1941): 409-14. For an earlier study of this fascinating subject, see E. C. Armstrong, *The Authorship of the Vengement Alixandre and of the Venjance Alixandre*, Elliott Monographs, 19 (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1926). For a concise overview, see Gosman, *La Légende d'Alexandre le Grand*, pp. 317-40.

<sup>7</sup> *Les Fais et les Conquistes du Noble Roy Alexandre*, edited by Nicolet Liscinsky. This prose romance is not to be confused with the work by Jehan Wauquelin that has been published under the same title: Jehan Wauquelin, *Les Faicts et Conquestes d'Alexandre le Grand*, edited by Sandrine Hériché (Geneva, Droz, 2000), Sandrine Hériché-Pradeau, *Alexandre le Bourguignon: Étude du roman « Les Faicts et conquestes d'Alexandre le Grand » de Jean Wauquelin* (Geneva, Droz, 2008). See also Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas, 'Les versions en prose du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle du Roman d'Alexandre: le manuscrit de Besançon et l'Histoire du bon roy Alexandre de Jean Wauquelin', *Littérales*, special issue: *L'Épopée tardive*, edited by François Suard, 22 (1998): 129-50, and Martin Gosman, 'Les Fais et conquestes du noble roy Alexandre: Dérimage ou remaniement?' in *Actes du IV<sup>e</sup> Colloque international sur le Moyen Français*, edited by Anthonij Dees (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1985), pp. 315-36.

<sup>8</sup> See the short discussions by Gaullier-Bougassas, 'Les versions en prose du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle', Paul Meyer, *Alexandre le Grand dans la littérature française du Moyen Âge*, 2 vols (Paris, Vieweg, 1886), II, pp. 328-329. The only substantial studies beside Nicolet Liscinsky's edition are by Gosman, and by Edward Billings Ham, *Five Versions of the "Venjance Alixandre"*, Elliott Monographs in the Romance Languages and Literature, 34 (Princeton, Paris, Princeton University Press, Presses universitaires de France, 1935). Robert Bossuat, 'Vasque de Lucène, traducteur de Quinte-Curce (1468)', *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance*, 8 (1946): 197-245.

<sup>9</sup> Gosman, pp. 315-16. The Besançon manuscript is described in *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France. Départements*, Tome XXXII. Besançon. Tome I. Fonds général (2), pp. 508-1004, and in *Arlima (Archives de littérature du Moyen Âge)*, < [http://www.arlima.net/eh/fais\\_et\\_conquestes\\_du\\_noble\\_roy\\_alexandre.html](http://www.arlima.net/eh/fais_et_conquestes_du_noble_roy_alexandre.html) >.

<sup>10</sup> For a recent study of this manuscript, see Mark Cruse, *Illuminating the "Roman d'Alexandre": Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> '...on assiste à un modeste glissement du sens grâce à un déplacement systématique d'accents et à la mise en situation de certaines préférences émanant d'une idéologie', Gosman, p. 317 and 325-30.

<sup>12</sup> Alexandre de Paris, Branch IV, *MFRA*, vol. II, ll. 1-14. All translations are mine.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolet Liscinsky, p. xvi.

<sup>14</sup> Michelle W. Warren, 'Take the World by Prose: Modes of Possession in the *Roman d'Alexandre*', in *The Medieval French Alexander*, edited by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (New York, SUNY, 2002), pp. 143-60, quotation on p. 148.

<sup>15</sup> Warren, p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> Warren, p. 144.

<sup>17</sup> Warren, p. 144.

<sup>18</sup> A.-J. Greimas, *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français jusqu'au milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, Larousse, 1980), p. 588, gives four definitions for the feminine noun *semblance*: disguise or feigned appearance, a symbol, a similarity in behaviour or in appearance, family resemblance.

<sup>19</sup> Edited in *MFRA*, vol. III, pp. 37-60.

<sup>20</sup> I follow Ulrich Mölk's analysis of these lines in his article, 'À propos de quelques passages difficiles de l'*Alexandre* d'Albéric', in *Miscellanea Medievalia: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard*, edited by Jean-Claude Faucon, Alain Labbé and Danielle Quérue, 2 vols (Paris, Champion, 1998), II, pp. 985-991.

<sup>21</sup> The *Alexandre* décasyllabique and the version by Lambert le Tort, *MFRA*, vol. I, *Text of the Arsenal and Venice Versions*, edited by M.S. La Du.

<sup>22</sup> Recent major studies of medieval teratology include David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1996); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and 'Introduction: Conceptualising the Monstrous,' in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, edited by Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 1-27.

<sup>23</sup> *MFRA*, vol. II, branch III, ll. 5149-60.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Generation, Degeneration, Regeneration: Original Sin and the Conception of Jesus in the Polemic between Augustine and Julian of Eclanum', in *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity to Modern Europe*, edited by Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee (Durham, London, Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 17-40, especially p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> On the Candace tradition, see Gaullier-Bougassas, *Les Romans d'Alexandre*, pp. 405-13.

<sup>26</sup> See the discussion of this passage by Nicolet Liscinsky, pp. 429-32.

<sup>27</sup> The vogue for 'antique' profile bust portraits was growing, but a surprising number of cameos and bust portraits, some of them used as seal-rings, have also survived from the medieval period, see H. Wentzel and Charles Mitchell, 'Portraits "à l'antique" on French Mediaeval Gems and Seals', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 16. 3/4 (1953): 342-350.

<sup>28</sup> Ham, 'An Eighth *Venjanse Alixandre*', p. 411, edited from a manuscript of Jean Mansel's *Fleurs des Histoires*, part V.